THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY ACQUISITIONS:

Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, French, 1724-1780

65.548 LABAN CHERCHANT SES DIEUX, painted in 1753
Oil on canvas, 17-15/16" x 21-5/8"

Gift of Ruth and Sherman E. Lee in memory of their parents, George B. Ward, Emery and Adelia Lee

Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, whose life and career match exactly the middle years of the eighteenth century, was a typical exponent of his time. Commencing as a student in the Royal Academy, he became consecutively a pupil in painting of Jeaurat, Colin de Vermont, and Boucher. When he failed to win the Prix de Rome in 1754, he left the academic curriculum and became instead one of the most versatile chroniclers and illustrators of the period, producing an immense output of work. His originality, spirit, and invention coupled with an unequaled refinement of style, make him in the first rank of "petits maitres" of the French eighteenth century.

An inventory of his possessions made shortly after his death in 1780 revealed a large canvas depicting the story of LABAN SEEKING FOR HIS LOST HOUSEHOLD GODS, a picture then already forgotten, but which Saint-Aubin had painted in 1753 and had submitted at the Concours of the Academy of 1753. If he had won, he would have gone to Rome to study.

This particular painting went on sale as Fragonard's. A hundred years later it reappeared and was at length recognized as Saint-Aubin's by Max Kann who recalled a Saint-Aubin engraving and preparatory drawing of the same subject.

To join these proofs of authenticity, now comes the latest discovery of the donor, Dr. Sherman E. Lee, whose gift, with Mrs. Lee, brings to the Museum collection the oil sketch for this large finished "concours".

With typical soft bright colors characteristic both of Saint-Aubin and of his time, this small canvas possesses the essential grace and charm, portrayed in eighteenth century terms, and, as only achieved by the hand of Saint-Aubin, of this favorite biblical subject.